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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 03/06/06-2

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Articles:

11) Iwakuni announces referendum on transfer of US carrier-borne aircraft

ASAHI (Page 2) (Full)  
March 6, 2006

Iwakuni City, Yamaguchi Prefecture, announced yesterday that a referendum will take place on March 12 to query local residents as to whether they would accept a plan to relocate US carrier-borne aircraft to a US military base in the city. Iwakuni will be the first city to hold a vote on the planned realignment of US forces in Japan. If a majority of citizens oppose the plan, it would have an impact on coordination work between the central government and host communities prior to Japan-US work to issue a final report at the end of March. If turnout is under 50%, the poll will become invalid and there will be no vote-counting.

Iwakuni Mayor Katsusuke Ihara said in a press conference yesterday: "On the premise that a majority of citizens would support the plan, I will ask (the central government) to alleviate noise pollution. If a majority oppose, I will seek the relocation plan be withdrawn." The US and Japan included in their interim report on US forces realignment out last October a plan to transfer 57 US carrier-borne planes from the Atsugi base in Kanagawa Prefecture to the Iwakuni base.

According to Iwakuni, the number of eligible voters is 84,823 (as of March 4), including 59 foreigners with permanent residence status.

12) Government watching moves in Iwakuni carefully prior to referendum but determined to implement plan regardless of outcome

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ASAHI (Page 2) (Full)  
March 6, 2006

The city of Iwakuni will hold a referendum on March 12 to ask citizens whether they will accept a plan to relocate US carrier-borne aircraft to a US military base in the city. The central government has said that the outcome will not affect the ongoing talks on the realignment of US forces in Japan, but it will watch the results carefully. Japan and the US have agreed to issue a final report at the end of March. Prior to this, the government hopes to settle the thorniest issue of relocating the US Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in Okinawa Prefecture and also to accelerate negotiations with other relevant local communities. But no prospects are in sight for an end to the impasse on Futenma due to opposition from local communities. Given the situation, the government wants to avoid highlighting more local objections.

The interim report on realignment adopted by the Japanese and US governments last October proposed such measures as strengthened collaboration between headquarters and joint use of military bases as part of efforts to improve the capability of the Japan-US alliance.

Japan and the US have already come up with plans (1) to transfer Futenma Air Station from Ginowan City to a coastal area of Nago City; and (2) to set up a joint operations headquarters to be formed by reorganizing the US Army 1st Corps Headquarters and a GSDF quick reaction unit headquarters at Camp Zama, Kanagawa Prefecture. The planned relocation of carrier-borne aircraft now stationed at the US Atsugi base to Iwakuni reportedly is intended to secure the forward deployment of the US forces over the long run.

Regarding the planned referendum, Defense Agency Director-General Nukaga said in a press conference on March 3: "We will watch the response of the citizens to the realignment plan."

As Nukaga said: "We must do what must be done." However, the government is determined to realize the relocation plan regardless of the results of the referendum. Chief Cabinet

Secretary Abe indicated in a press briefing on March 3 that the

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government would continue efforts to persuade local communities to accept the plan, saying: "We would like to make efforts to persuade them to endorse the plan in accordance with the agreement reached between Japan and the US."

But no progress has been made in the work to solicit agreement from base-hosting local governments across the nation. The government takes the view that a settlement of the Futenma relocation issue will give an impetus to negotiations with other local communities. But local opposition remains strong.

The government does not want to see a majority of Iwakuni citizens vote against the plan. It is paying attention to moves in the city.

13) New radar at Aomori base designed to deal with North Korean ballistic missiles, governor informed

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Abridged)

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March 4, 2006

A senior official of the Defense Facilities Administration Agency (DFAA) on March 3 met with Aomori Governor Shingo Mimura at the prefectural headquarters and informed him that the Japanese and United States governments had agreed to the deployment of the US military's state-of-the-art X-Band radar to the Air Self-Defense Force's (ASDF) Shariki Detachment base in Tsugaru City in Aomori Prefecture. The two governments are coordinating a possible deployment of the radar in FY2006, when Japan's missile defense (MD) system is introduced. However, Governor Mimura stated, "I cannot go along with anything that strengthens the base's functions. We would like to respond to the move cautiously and deliberately."

The X-Band radar is the US' latest type, developed for use in intercepting ballistic missiles by sending out X-band radio-waves, which can detect the difference between armed ballistic missiles and decoy missiles. Since the Shariki base faces the Japan Sea, the target of the new radar system would be incoming missiles from North Korea.

14) Japan to establish closer ties with India on security front, envisioning joint military drills in Indian Ocean, aims to counter China

SANKEI (Page 5) (Full)

March 6, 2006

The government yesterday decided to step up cooperation with India in the security area ahead of Defense Minister Mukherjee's visit to Japan slated for March 20. This decision is also intended to counter the increasing military power of China by strengthening political and security cooperation between Japan and India in addition to their economic cooperation, where the two nations have been actively engaged in negotiations on concluding an economic partnership agreement (EPA).

Defense Minister Mukherjee will make his first visit to Japan. During his stay in Japan, he will meet and exchange views with Japanese leaders, including Foreign Minister Taro Aso and Defense Agency Director-General Fukushima Nukaga.

Japan and India have already set in motion a reciprocal visit program involving defense and coast guard senior working-level officials and are advancing cooperation in such areas as combating piracy and search and rescue efforts. In the Japan-India security dialogue in February, the two nations agreed to enhance political exchanges, given "the need to drastically strengthen security and defense exchanges," according to a source involved in negotiations.

Japan has focused its efforts on leading India to participate in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), which is aimed at preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. India is reportedly considering participating in the PSI as an observer. During the series of talks, Japan intends to urge India to swiftly take part. If India participates, Japan will be able to conduct, for instance, joint maritime drills in the Indian Ocean, through which the sea-lanes linking Japan to the Middle East pass. India's participation would be of significance in terms of energy security, as well.

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With the United States improving its ties with India, as evidenced by the recent visit to India by President Bush, Japan is now aiming to counter China by emphasizing the strengthened ties among Japan, the US, and India in the areas of politics, the economy, security, and defense.

15) Fukuda: Repairing relations with China, South Korea important

SANKEI (Page 5) (Full)  
March 6, 2006

Former Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda of the Liberal Democratic Party late yesterday delivered a speech in Date City, Fukushima Prefecture, in which he indicated that improving relations with other nations, including China and South Korea, is important, saying: "East Asia will continue to grow. Exchanges with Asian nations will become the source of Japan's economic growth, won't they?"

Speaking of the bill to revise the Imperial House Law, the submission of which the government has decided to delay, Fukuda stated: "Quick action is necessary, otherwise the continuity of the imperial family could be in jeopardy. The bill may be introduced (in the Diet) earlier than expected."

16) Share of UN expenses; Japan to propose floor for permanent members; Increase in Chinese, Russian shares eyed

MAINICHI (Page 1) (Full)  
March 1, 2006

The government yesterday decided to propose a floor for the shares of permanent UN Security Council (UNSC) members during upcoming talks to review their contributions to the UN regular budget (administrative expenses). The aim is to constrain Japan's share by adopting a system that takes into account the position and responsibility of permanent UNSC members, as well as their economic potential, in assessing dues. However, such a proposal will most likely incur opposition from China and Russia, whose share will likely rise as a result. Coordination of views will likely be difficult.

Talks to reevaluate UN members' shares for the period from fiscal 2007 through fiscal 2009 are scheduled to resume at the fifth committee of the UN General Assembly and be adopted by the end of this year. Japan is the second largest contributor, paying for 19.5% of the budget. It intends to claim that it is unfair that its share exceeds the combined 15.3% paid by four UNSC member nations - Britain, France, China, and Russia. Japan hopes to add as criteria in making the calculations the position and responsibility of permanent UNSC members, along with their current economic potential, based on gross national income (GNI).

The current ceiling of 22% is applied only to the US, and the floor of 0.001% is applied to 49 developing countries with a weak economy. Japan intends to propose adopting a floor for permanent UNSC members at a meeting of the 5th Committee starting on Mar. 3 with the argument being that "in view of the fact that permanent members are in the position of making decisions on key issues, they should bear a due fiscal burden," as a senior Foreign Ministry official put it.

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A specific floor would be determined later, but the level is bound to exceed China's 2.1% and Russia's 1.1 % . Whether the Japanese plan can be adopted is not clear, but the senior MOFA official noted, "It is important for Japan to make its position clear."

17) Poll: Record 65% favor constitutional revision, 27% against

MAINICHI (Top play) (Abridged)  
March 5, 2006

The Mainichi Shimbun found from its recent nationwide public opinion survey that 65% of the Japanese public are in favor of revising Japan's postwar constitution, with 27% opposing constitutional revision. In the survey, a total of 80% took a positive view of its role, saying it has helped Japan maintain its postwar peace and improve its public lives.

The survey this time was conducted Feb. 10-11 by telephone. In the past, the Mainichi Shimbun has also asked similar questions in its face-to-face surveys, as well as telephone-based surveys, with a set of "yes" and "no" options plus "I don't know." The proportion of those in favor of constitutional revision was 20% to 40% in surveys conducted from 1982 to 2004. In the following three surveys from April 2004, respondents were asked to pick "yes" or "no" only. In those surveys, "yes" accounted for about 60%. The results of previous polls and the one taken this time cannot be simply compared due to different polling methodologies. In the latest survey, however, the pro-revision figure marked an all-time high.

Among male respondents, "yes" accounted for 67%, with "no" at 26%, and among female respondents, "yes" reached 64%, with "no" at 27%. In the breakdown of respondents into age brackets, "yes" was comparatively high, ranging from 67% to 72%, among those in their 20s to 40s; over 60% among those in their 50s and 60s; and 47% among those aged 70 and over. Broken down into political party supporters, "yes" accounted for about 80% among those in support of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and among those in support of the New Komeito party, a coalition partner of the LDP, with about 60% among those in support of the leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto). However, "no" topped 50% among those in support of the Japanese Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party (SDP or Shaminto).

In the survey this time, respondents were also asked if they thought Japan's postwar constitution has helped with Japan's maintenance of its postwar peace and with Japan's improvement of its people's livelihood. In response to this question, "yes" totaled 80%, broken down into "very much" at 26% and "somewhat" at 54%. In the breakdown of negative answers, "not very much" accounted for 14%, with "not at all" at only 2%. Positive answers accounted for 83% among LDP supporters, with 75% among DPJ supporters.

18) New Komeito to reshuffle top party lineup; Kanzaki-Fuyushiba management structure to end in October

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Excerpts)  
March 5, 2006

The expectation is that New Komeito leader Takenori Kanzaki, 62,

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will not run in the party presidential race in October and that Secretary General Tetsuzo Fuyushiba, 69, will step down from his

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post. The current leadership, which has formed a coalition with the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), has gained influence over the party by supporting the LDP in elections. At the same time, however, they produced little positive results, since the party's political presence decreased as the LDP made great strides in the elections. With an eye on the upcoming House of Councillors

election slated for next summer, the New Komeito will engage in full-scale coordination on a plan to put together a new leadership lineup, while dealing with such difficult problems as expanding the party's strength and playing up its own political identity.

In a meeting on March 3 of its House of Representatives members, Kanzaki suddenly stated: "The LDP's presidential race and other matters will soon be talked about. The personnel changes of our party also will be the subject of much conversation in various circles."

The Kanzaki-Fuyushiba leadership will celebrate its eighth anniversary in the fall. The two leaders have made efforts to expand relations with the LDP since the New Komeito joined the government of Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi in October 1999. However, out of strong concern about the result of next summer's Upper House election, they have decided to put an end to the present executive lineup.

The LDP won a landslide victory in last September's Lower House election, in which Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi asked voters their views on his postal-privatization bills. The New Komeito, however, lost three seats even though it gained some votes. The party was unable to secure 10 million votes, the party's target. The party has the solid voting support of the religious sect Soka Gakkai, New Komeito's backer. However unless it broadens its support to attract other voters, it cannot expect to boost its strength, particularly since there are moves toward a two-party system.

The LDP increased its number of seats in last year's Lower House election. As a result, the political presence of the New Komeito has rapidly declined. The LDP has asserted its views over the Komeito's in many negotiations between the two parties.

19) Minshuto's Maehara, Hatoyama deny Watanabe's prospect for early party presidential race

YOMIURI (Page 1) (Full)  
March 6, 2006

Appearing on a Fuji TV program yesterday, Kozo Watanabe, the new Diet Affairs Committee chairman of the main opposition party Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) speculated that the party's leadership election, now planned for September, could be carried out earlier than the planned. "Depending on the situation, it might be carried out sometime after the regular Diet session ends," he said.

However, Minshuto President Seiichi Maehara told reporters in the city of Yonago, Tottori Prefecture, "I would like to do my best until September when my term of office expires." He denied the possibility of quitting his job before September. Secretary

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General Yukio Hatoyama also said in a speech in the city of Mombetsu, Hokkaido, "We will not move up the planned schedule. We will hold the presidential election in September."

Asked reporters about his real intention on a possible early Minshuto leadership race, Watanabe responded:

"Since Minshuto is on the verge of collapse, I don't want to see unnecessary competition in the party. Basically, Mr. Maehara has to serve in the post (until September). During the ongoing regular Diet session, we will fulfill the responsibility of the largest opposition party under the leadership of Mr. Maehara."

20) Minshuto leadership race: Watanabe says, "Mr. Hatoyama is most likely;" "It's time for Mr. Ozawa," Hatoyama says

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)  
March 6, 2006

Top officials of the largest opposition party Minshuto

(Democratic Party of Japan) yesterday made remarks about prospective candidates in the party's presidential election. Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Kozo Watanabe said on a TV program that Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama would be the "most likely" candidate. Hatoyama, however, stated, "Former Vice President Ichiro Ozawa is one of the likely candidates."

Referring to requirements for a presidential candidate, Watanabe pointed out: "We will absolutely not pick those maneuvering for the presidential post. We will pick a person cooperating for the reconstruction of the party." As to the possibility of reelection of Maehara, he said, "There is a possibility. The question is whether he will make an effort or not." Regarding Ozawa, "If he remains calm and does not plot to remove Maehara from the post, party members might call on Mr. Ozawa to serve in the presidential post," Watanabe said. Asked about the possibility of former party head Naoto Kan, "If he took the Diet affair chief post (replacing Yoshihiko Noda), Mr. Kan will certainly be able to become the next president. But (the possibility is low)." He said there was no possibility of he himself becoming president.

Yukio Hatoyama said in a speech in the city of Mombetsu, Hokkaido, "The time for Mr. Ozawa to become party head is gradually approaching." In a press meeting after the speech, Hatoyama stated, "It is good that three candidates will run for the leadership race. I have heard that (Mr. Ozawa) denied (any desire for the post)."

Asked about whether he would run in the election, Hatoyama responded, "I have no intention to do so. I am perplexed with (Watanabe's prospect that Hatoyama is the most likely candidate)."

SCHIEFFER